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ABSTRACT

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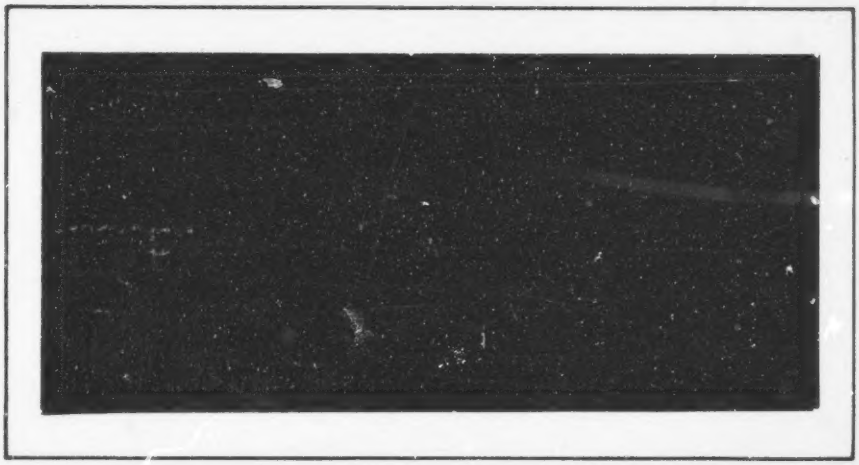

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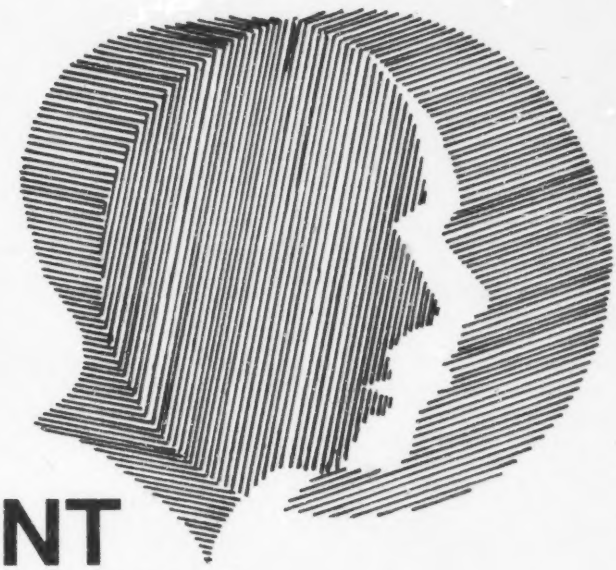

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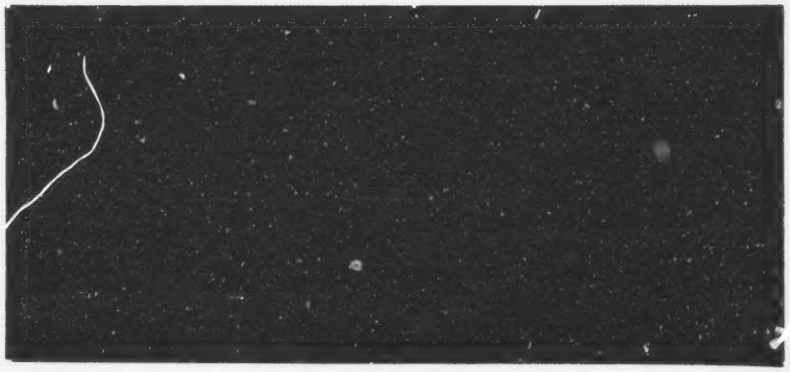

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The cover depicts man's striving toward unity of personality, represented by the magic circle, or mandala.

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CURRENT FEES CHARGING PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTERS

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Abstract

A questionnaire designed to assess the practice of charging special fees for counseling, testing, and outreach programs as well as the perceptions of counseling center directors on the fee issue was sent to 281 Directors of college and university counseling centers. Two hundred and twenty-five, 80%, were returned. The results indicated that approximately one-third of the agencies received partial funding from student fees. Only 3% receive compensation from student or faculty insurance programs. Charging fees for counseling services to students is a practice of only 4% of the respondents, a proportion which has remained stable over the past ten years. In contrast, the proportion of agencies which charge fees for testing have increased from 11 to 34% over the 10 year period. Although 81% of all respondents were against charging fees for services, only 51% indicated that the fee issue was discussed on their campus within the past year.

CURRENT FEES CHARGING PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTERS

A review of the Educational Abstracts and the Psychological Abstracts reveals few studies relating specifically to the use of fees in college and university counseling centers. In a 1964 study of 36 counseling centers with student enrollments of over 10,000, Paulsen found 58% fully supported by direct appropriations. Only four charged fees to students for testing services and two for counseling services. Others charged fees for non-students, collected student fees at registration, or had other means of support. Nugent and Pareis (1968) found 4% of the universities they surveyed charged fees to students for counseling, and 19% charged fees to students for testing.

The issue of charging fees is a topic that has retained the interest of both administrators and counselors and warrants periodic follow-up. This study was conducted to survey the present fee practices of college and university counseling centers across the country and also to assess the perceptions of center directors regarding the use of fees.

Method

On October 25th, 1973, 281 questionnaires were sent to college and university counseling center directors. Two weeks later 109 follow-up letters were sent to those who had not yet responded. There was a total of 225 useable returns by the cut-off date of November 30th, a response rate of 80%.

The questionnaire asked whether fees were charged for counseling, testing, or outreach programs, how they were charged, why, whether charging fees had been an issue on campus, and perceptions concerning the issue of charging fees. Demographic data included the student enrollment of the institution, and whether or not it was public or private.

Results and Discussion

All questionnaires were divided into four institutional categories based on student enrollment: public institutions under 10,000, public institutions of 10,000 or over, private institutions under 5,000 and private institutions of 5,000 and over. The reason for dividing the private institutions differently than public institutions was that fewer private institutions have enrollments over 10,000.

Financial Support of Counseling Centers

Table 1 contains the tabulated results of the quantifiable portions of the questionnaire. Eighty-two of the 225 respondents (36%) indicated that their agencies receive partial funding from student fees and/or tuition. This indicates that well over half of the Centers in this sample still receive either all or a majority of their funding from sources other than student payments. There does appear to be a difference between private and public institutions with approximately 45% of private institutions receiving partial funding from student payments compared to 33% of the public institutions.

The number of agencies whose services are either in part or in full covered by student and/or faculty insurance plans is so small as to be negligible. As the data in Table 1 indicate, only 7 (3%) of the 225 institutions represented indicate coverage of this kind. Although informal conversations at conventions and other professional meetings will frequently mention this as a possible future trend, the results of this survey indicate that there is certainly not much actual movement in this direction.

Fees for Counseling, Testing and Outreach

Table 1 contains the summarization of questionnaire results concerning fees charging practices for counseling, testing, and outreach services. Although 20% of the respondents indicated that fees were charged for counseling, 16% of these specified that fees were charged for non-students only. This leaves just 4% of the sample charging fees for counseling

services to students. Paulsen (1964) found 5% of his sample charging fees for students, Nugent and Pareis (1968) reported 4% charging fees for student counseling, and in this survey the 4% indicates that there is certainly not a trend in fees charged for counseling services. We do not have the data necessary for longitudinal observation concerning fees charged to non-students in the counseling area, but it may well be that the 16% reported in this study represents an increase over past practices.

A total of 120 (53%) agencies in this survey reported fees charged for testing services with 42 (19%) specifying testing fees were for non-students only, leaving 34% who do charge fees for their student population. This compares with Paulsen's (1964) reporting of 11% and Nugent and Pareis (1968) 19% charging students fees for testing. These results suggest a definite trend in the direction of the more frequent charging of fees for testing services. This may reflect the general movement of testing centers toward offering testing services for an increasing variety of purposes such as examination for credit, examination for the waiving of academic requirements, etc.

Neither the 1964 nor the 1968 survey of fees charging practices asked about outreach programs. The information in Table 1 indicates that a total of 14% of the sample charged fees for outreach with 4% of these specifying that these fees were charged to non-students only. The fact that the percentage for this category is higher than for counseling services may reflect a greater tendency on the part of agencies to offer outreach programs in a wider variety of settings and during the evenings and on weekends. It may also reflect a tendency for agencies to charge less often for remedial services than for developmental services (Morrill, Oetting & Hurst, 1974)

The remaining data in Table 1 reveals a definite preference for flat rate fees as opposed to fees on a sliding scale. Although a flat rate

system is more easily administered, a sliding scale based on such things as family income, or student need may be more sensitive to both students and non-students. In all likelihood, the fact that counseling centers have not given extensive attention to the charging of fees in the past may have resulted in the flat rate preference. In any event, it seems that of those agencies who do charge fees, a greater number should give consideration to the advantages of a sliding scale for their clientele.

Reasons for Charging Fees

Reasons why fees were charged were similar for all four classifications of institutions. In general, fees were charged because of financial necessity, to reduce requests from the non-student population, to provide for the extension of services to non-students, to make the service more valuable to the clients by increasing motivation, and to limit long-term clients.

Fees for testing generally covered the cost of materials and scoring. Most fees mentioned were for tests such as the SVIB, Kuder, GED, CLEP, Miller Analogies, etc. Testing fees were often used to supplement the capital outlay budget for items such as drapes, chairs, etc.

Reasons for charging fees for outreach programs were also basically due to financial necessity. It seemed the only way, in several cases, to expand services into needed areas. In one case, the university would not support certain programs so fees were charged to finance them. Fees also covered the cost of off-campus housing, meals, and transportation for weekend developmental laboratories.

The Issue of Charging Fees

A total of 115 (51%) agencies stated that the issue of charging fees for services had been discussed on their campus (Table 1). In most cases, it was a brief discussion either within the counseling center staff, or between the staff and the administration. The issue had been brought up,

proposed, and rejected in many cases. Discussions also considered the possibility of the future financial necessity of charging fees for all counseling contacts, for testing, for long-term counseling, or for non-students.

General Impressions of Charging Fees

A total of 104 respondents to the questionnaire stated they were absolutely against charging fees. Some not only expressed negative impressions, but also gave reasons. Thirty felt counseling center services should be an integral part of the educational function of the university, not an auxiliary service, and that charging fees would isolate the counseling center from the rest of the university community. The fact that not all students can afford to pay fees for services was a criticism made by 27 respondents. Five private universities mentioned that students already pay high tuition, so it would be unfair to also charge fees for counseling services. Eight felt charging fees would discourage use of the counseling center, and five indicated counseling should be a service available to all students, not just those who can afford an extra fee. Three brought out the criticism that by charging fees, preventative and developmental programs would be curtailed because fewer students would pay for those programs than for remedial programs.

Eighteen respondents stated their impressions of charging fees were mixed, and thirteen felt their impressions were positive. Seven indicated fees for testing, eight indicated fees for long-term clients, and twelve indicated fees for non-students would be desireable. The possible therapeutic benefit of charging fees in terms of increasing client motivation, getting greater commitment from the client, and making the counseling process more meaningful was discussed by 15 respondents. Two indicated fees would reduce requests for services from an already overworked counseling center, and only those who really needed help would use it. Three indicated

fees would be good for "high-risk" experimental programs that would be hard to justify otherwise. Only seven felt the issue of charging fees should be explored in more depth.

Conclusions

1. There appears to be a greater proportion of private than public institutions receiving financial support from student fees and/or tuition. About one-third of all institutions receive funding from this source.

2. Only 3% of the 225 agencies represented in the sample have any part of their services covered by any insurance plan.

3. The proportion of counseling centers charging fees to students for counseling services appears to have remained stable over the past 10 years at 4% to 5%.

4. The practice of charging fees for testing services appears to have increased over the past 10 years from 11% in 1964 to 34% in the present survey.

5. The practice of charging fees for all services to non-students may be increasing in popularity.

6. Among those agencies who do charge fees, a flat rate system is much more common than one based on a sliding scale.

7. The issue of whether or not to charge fees has been recently discussed on more than half of the institutions surveyed.

8. Eighty-one percent of the directors surveyed stated flatly an opposition to charging fees with 6% being in favor and 8% stating ambivalence on the issue.

Table 1

Counseling Center Fees Charging Practices - December, 1973

	Public Institutions under 10,000 enrollment N=71	Public Institutions over 10,000 enrollment N=93	Private Institutions under 5,000 enrollment N=34	Private Institutions over 5,000 enrollment N=27	TOTAL N=225
Partial Funding from Student Fees and/or Tuition	25 (34%)	30 (32%)	13 (38%)	14 (52%)	82 (36%)
Services Covered by Student and/or Faculty Insurance	3 (4%)	2 (2%)	2 (6%)	0	7 (3%)
Fees for Counseling Services	7 (10%)	20 (22%)	7 (21%)	10 (37%)	44 (20%)
Specified for non-students only	6 (8%)	17 (18%)	6 (18%)	8 (30%)	37 (16%)
Fees for Testing Services	38 (54%)	54 (58%)	13 (38%)	15 (56%)	120 (53%)
Specified for non-students only	12 (17%)	18 (19%)	4 (12%)	8 (30%)	42 (19%)
Fees for Outreach Programs	8 (11%)	21 (23%)	3 (9%)	0	32 (14%)
Specified for non-students only	2 (3%)	6 (6%)	2 (6%)	0	10 (4%)
Fees Based on Flat Rate	25 (35%)	38 (40%)	8 (24%)	8 (30%)	79 (35%)
Fees Based on Sliding Scale	2 (3%)	6 (6%)	2 (6%)	5 (19%)	15 (7%)
Fees has been an issue on Campus	31 (44%)	52 (56%)	15 (44%)	17 (63%)	115 (51%)
Opposed to Fees					182 (81%)
Ambivalent Concerning Fees					18 (8%)
Favored Fees					13 (6%)

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